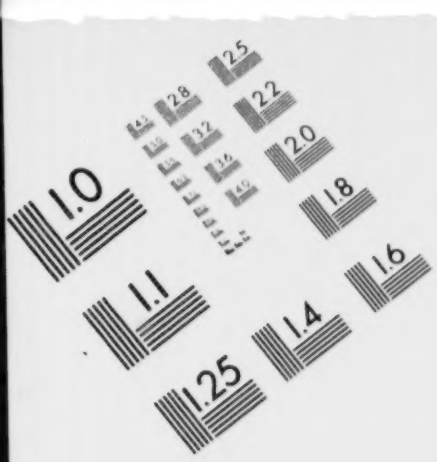

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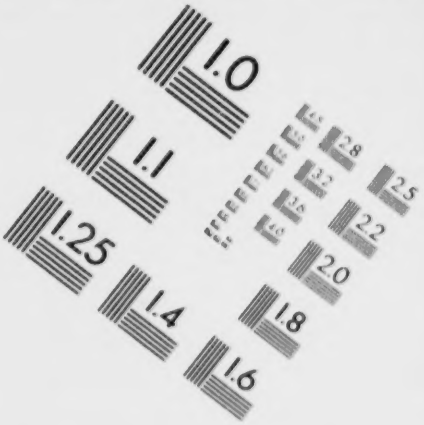

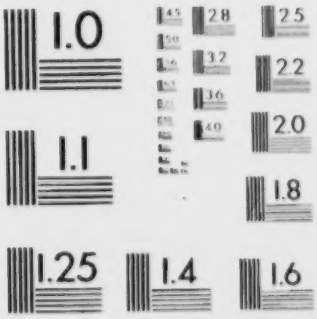

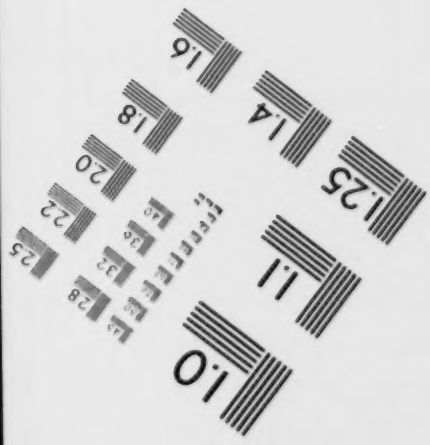

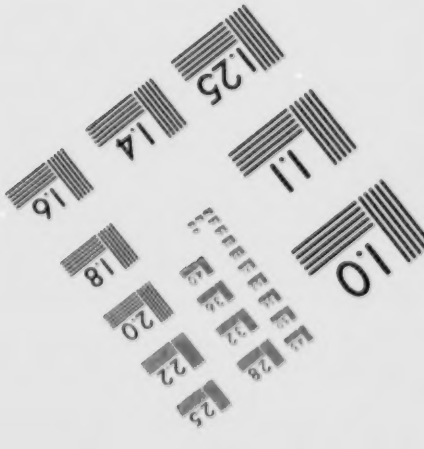

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ABSTRACT

The linguistic behavior of individuals and people in the official literature on lifelong learning (LL) was examined and interpreted in light of the theories of individualization in late modern culture and society, particularly the theories of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. The analysis was performed to shed light on that literature's ideological stance toward participants in the "learning society" and to demonstrate that the analysis of language is crucial to social and cultural inquiry. A 900,000-word corpus of recent government and academic publications on LL was used to perform a concordance-based analysis of the collocations of "individuals" as members of institutionalized collectives, agents, rational citizens, and consumers and to compare them with "people". The 1 million word British National Corpus was used as a reference corpus. The LL corpus contained 1,775 instances of forms of the word "individual" and 1,450 instances of "people," whereas the British National Corpus contained 22,264 instances of forms of the word "individual" and 123,427 instances of "people." By demonstrating that "individual" occurs more frequently with societal institutions in the LL discourse than in general usage, that individuals and people are different, and that people is a far more frequent word in the whole language than it is in policy-making, the researcher concluded that the different usage of "individuals" and "people" show that the discourse of LL has close affinities with contemporary sociocultural models of individualization, consumption, production, and the risk society. (The bibliography lists 41 references. A list of 30 documents in the lifelong learning corpus is appended.) (Author/MN)

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SOME HAVE CREDIT CARDS AND OTHERS HAVE GIRO CHEQUES: A STUDY OF NEW LABOUR'S 'INDIVIDUALS' AND 'PEOPLE' AS LIFELONG LEARNERS IN LATE MODERNITY

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Some have credit cards and others have giro cheques: A study of New Labour's 'individuals' and 'people' as lifelong learners in late modernity

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The paper examines and interprets the linguistic behaviour of individuals and people in the official literature of lifelong learning in the light of theories of individualisation in late modern culture and society, particularly those of Beck and Giddens. It aims to shed light on this literature's ideological stance towards the participants in the putative 'learning society', and to demonstrate that the analysis of language is crucial to social and cultural inquiry. Using a 900,000-word corpus of recent government and academic publications, it presents a concordance-based analysis of the collocations of 'individuals'—as members of institutionalised collectivities, as agents, as rational citizens, and as consumers—and compares them with 'people'. The British National Corpus is used as a reference corpus. The study concludes that the differences between individuals and people demonstrate that the discourse of lifelong learning has close affinities with contemporary socio-cultural models of individualisation, consumption and production, and the risk society.

Introduction

'Individuals' and 'people' are hardly the most exciting of words. Indeed these apparently synonymous generic plurals are positively anonymous, almost invisible, within the flow of language, as is any material distinction between their meanings. However, as this paper will demonstrate, *individuals* and *people* take on a particular significance in the official literature of lifelong learning, one of the many policy-making discourses at the centre of the current UK government's programme. Using the methods of corpus linguistics, I will show how two such apparently neutral words draw and construct particular meanings from within the discourse in which they occur, and how they situate government policy demonstrably within contemporary social and cultural analyses of late modernity. By so doing, I seek to exemplify an important function of sociolinguistics, namely to evaluate social and cultural theories against detailed linguistic and textual evidence.

Why should lifelong learning be interesting for a sociolinguist? In my particular case the stimulus derived from ordinary working life, in that two of the senior figures in my own university have established a profile within the national learning agenda (Fryer 1997; Newby, reported in Elliott Major 1999) with a consequent effect on the institution's own strategic planning. Reading the ever increasing official literature on the subject of widening participation, the 'learning society' and lifelong learning (see, for example, my Appendix and the Department for Education and Employment's (1999) constantly updated Lifelong Learning website), it did not seem very apparent to me either what people were supposed to be learning, nor indeed which people were supposed to be learning nor how this learning was to come about. So being a linguist rather than a policy maker, I decided

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to investigate this apparent confusion by creating as near to a 1 million word corpus of the documentation as I could find in digitised form and then to carry out a concordance-based analysis of *learning* and the processes and participants involved in its collocations. The results of this analysis I then compared with a large reference corpus of general usage, the Bank of English.

As a theoretical framework for the study above (Piper in press) I used the notion of human capital, since this is one of the justifications invoked by politicians with an enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Human capital is the concept of educational expenditure as a form of investment, an old theory which was revived in the 1960s (Schultz 1963; Becker 1964). It is construed both as pertaining to the individual, where human beings invest in their own education and training (Woodhall 1995: 24), and to the state, as in the statement 'Europe must make full use of its assets to renew education and training in order to improve the competitiveness of European human capital' (European Commission 1996: para.100).

From a linguistic point of view, I wanted to investigate the role of *learning* as a cultural keyword (see Stubbs 1996). Using a systemic-functional approach, I examined the way in which the nominalisation of *learning* enacts its role as a participant in social and cultural processes, and the part played by human agency when the Sensers and Phenomena which the Bank of English reveals to be normally present with this word are mostly absent. What emerged from the study was that *learning* in the discourse of 'lifelong learning' is a managed and commodified socio-economic process, and that it is particularly related to human capital theory by its association with *individuals* acting as both producers and consumers. Thus I was able to show how the meaning of *learning* is being extended by the recurrent wordings which occur in its environment, and to provide evidence of how, as a new discourse develops, 'linguistic categories become social categories' (Stubbs 1996: 194).

One of the phenomena emerging from this human capital study was the significant difference in the collocational behaviour, and thus participant roles, of *individuals* and *people* in the learning process. These turned out to be two key words in the discourse whose apparent similarity, as with Stubbs's study of *small* and *little* (Stubbs 1997: 113), was highly misleading. This suggested extending the theoretical context of the analysis to examine in what ways the linguistic construction of *individuals* in the discourse of lifelong learning acts as evidence for broader social analyses of individualisation (Giddens 1991; Beck 1994; Giddens 1994; Beck 1998). 'The move to the learning society', says the European Commission, 'must be centred on the individual' (European Commission 1995: 51), a particularly explicit formulation of one of the fundamental assumptions threading its way through the official lifelong learning literature of Europe and the UK. This official statement conveys the status of the singular or plural *individual* as a keyword in current models both of society and of lifelong learning, and hence the topic of this study.

Aims, hypotheses and structure of the paper

In broad theoretical terms my purpose is to demonstrate how linguistic analysis articulates with social theory and to support the claim that 'social analyses of language are indispensable to social inquiry' (Coupland 1998: 116). As it happens, Coupland's claim is particularly relevant here in that it is illustrated with reference to the work of Giddens and

others on late modernity, 'social constructivist' theories 'where there is an urgent need to develop analyses of the constituent potential of language, rather than merely assume it (*ibid*: 116). In the detail of the paper I examine the linguistic behaviour of *individuals* in a corpus of official and quasi-official literature of lifelong learning and compare this with its behaviour in a corpus of general usage. Using this analysis I aim to shed light on the ideological stance which the lifelong learning literature presents towards the participants in the putative learning society and also to show how this stance represents and contributes to contemporary socio-cultural analyses of individualisation and the individual.

Given the evidence of my earlier study and since the lifelong learning corpus represents a policy-making discourse within mainstream western democracy, it seems likely that the behaviour of *individuals* will articulate fairly closely with western theories of late- or post-modernism both in style and meaning. However, the data from which such social and cultural theorising derives is not confined to policy-making documents, so that while in general use across the language we might expect the collocations and structural roles of *individuals* to be different from how they are in those documents, any distinctiveness is likely to be one of degree. In looking for differences, therefore, the primary one in the study is likely to be between *individuals* and *people* in both corpora.

I introduce the study with a short overview of theories of individualisation, bearing in mind that in a short linguistically-oriented paper it is not possible to do justice to their complexities and subtleties nor to offer a critique beyond a few closing observations. After commenting on the nature of my corpus and the concordance-based methodology, I present a series of analyses of *individuals*—as members of institutionalised collectivities, as agents, as rational citizens, and as consumers—and I show how *individuals* are different from *people*. Using the British National Corpus as a reference corpus of general usage, I then compare both *individuals* and *people* with their occurrences in everyday, rather than socio-political and academic, discourse. Finally I note some implications of the study for social theory, for policy-making and for sociolinguistics.

Individuals and individualism

Given the enthusiasm of the current British government both for lifelong learning, in which the individual is so much the focus of attention, and for a new version of social democracy presented for public consumption as 'The Third Way', I will use the latter as the context for my observations on individualism. Later, within my analysis of the data, I will also examine cultural theories of consumption as these relate to my argument about individuals and learning. A good summarising place to start is with the writings of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, who is also a theorist of the risk society (Beck 1992). He is quoted at some length by Anthony Giddens in *The Third Way*—his exposition for the educated public rather than fellow sociologists—in an extract which brings together a comprehensive range of issues. Individualism, says Beck

> is not Thatcherism, not market individualism, not atomization. On the contrary, it means "institutionalized individualism". Most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state, for example, are designed for individuals rather than for families. In many cases they presuppose employment. Employment in turn implies education and both of these presuppose mobility. By all these requirements people are invited

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to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals (Beck 1998, quoted in Giddens 1998: 36).

Giddens explicates this text in terms of activity and responsibility. 'We have to make our lives in a more active way than was true of previous generations, and we need more actively to accept responsibilities for the consequences of what we do and the lifestyle habits we adopt... we have to find a new balance between individual and collective responsibilities today' (*ibid*: 37). Indeed in a section addressed to Third Way values, he presents the idea of no rights without responsibilities as 'a prime motto for the new politics' (*ibid*: 65).

Government reports on competitiveness are an example of a discourse which is pervaded by the responsibility of the individual (e.g. Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1995), where in this case the responsibility is for their own lifelong retraining. 'It is this heavy concentration on the role of individuals', claims the Director of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) research programme on The Learning Society (Economic and Social Research Council 1999), 'which is the weakest aspect of both British and European policies on education, training and employment' (Coffield 1996c: 80), and he cites the Confederation of British Industry, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the Association of Graduate Recruiters and the National Campaign for Learning as UK examples. The latter dreamed up the splendid slogan 'Learning's better than sex', except that the report under the headline reveals that people between the ages of 16 and 34 think sex is better than learning. This dissonance between conceptualising lifelong learning as responsibility and as consumption is something I will return to later.

Thus in the European welfare state, the individual is the subject of entitlements but also of increasing obligations. Beck argues that opportunities, threats and ambivalences which were previously overcome within the family or community, the social class or group, are now 'perceived, interpreted and handled' by the individual. 'Individuals are now expected to master these "risky opportunities", without being able, owing to the complexity of modern society, to make the necessary decisions on a well-founded and responsible basis' (Beck 1994: 8). Individualism is therefore the making of the individual by the individual, not the separation of the individual from society, nor some kind of emancipation. 'Individualisation is a compulsion, but a compulsion for the manufacture, self-design and self-staging of not just one's own biography but also its commitments and networks as preferences and life phases change, but, of course, under the overall conditions and models of the welfare state' (*ibid*: 14). Giddens phrases the idea of staging one's biography as 'the project of the self'. In these days of late modernity this has much to do with 'the visible signs of successful consumption', so that 'to a greater or lesser degree the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life' (Giddens 1991: 198). Under such conditions, it is hardly surprising that younger people have other things on their minds than learning.

Responsibility represented as decision making is not a straightforward equation, either in terms of overall advantages to society or the complexities of decision making itself. Coffield points out that the UK's Modern Apprenticeship Scheme attracted nearly ten times more hairdressers, shop assistants and child-minders than young people training in information technology, and that individualist training policies do not take into account the cultural complexities of how young people take decisions about their lives (1996c: 84).

However, individuals who do not manage to constitute themselves as individuals, that is 'to plan, understand, design, or act', will 'suffer the consequences which will have been self-inflicted in case of failure' (Beck 1994: 16). And failure, among other things, means poverty.

'Poverty', says Giddens, 'was never easily defined, but becomes much more complex than it used to be when we consider the risk environments implied in institutional reflexivity (Giddens 1994: 188). Here, in connection with poverty, we have two further key theoretical concepts in the work of Beck and Giddens—risk and reflexivity. Briefly explained, reflexivity in this sense means 'the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity... to chronic revision in the light of new information and knowledge', such information and knowledge being 'not incidental to modern institutions' but used in a regularised manner to constitute the way they are organised and transformed (Giddens 1991: 20). 'Risks tell us what should not be done', so that in the risk society, 'avoidance imperatives dominate', and risk is itself a phenomenon of reflexivity, in that 'the expansion and heightening of the intention of control ultimately ends up producing the opposite' (Beck 1994: 9).

'The more the demand to "make one's own life" becomes acute, the more material poverty becomes a double discrimination. Not only is there lack of access to material rewards, the capacities for autonomy enjoyed by others may become crushed. Some of the principal dynamics of stratification thereby are altered' (Giddens 1994: 188). That is, individuals are no longer protected, although not necessarily hindered either, by social class or by traditional group cultures or affinities. In cultural matters like dress, music and diet 'people in the poorest ghettos link themselves to transnational "communities of taste" in an active way' (Giddens 1994: 188). And in their political beliefs and commitments, 'everyone thinks and acts as a right-winger and left-winger... all at the same time' depending on the issue, a phenomenon of 'contradictory multiple engagement' where 'the current clarities of politics... are no longer correct or effective (Beck 1994: 21). Here we have examples of Giddens's definition of individualisation: 'first, the dis-embedding and, second, the re-embedding of industrial society ways of life by new ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves' in an environment of new, often global, interdependences (1994: 13). This hint of the cobbling-together precariousness of the biography-making individual is an image taken to bleak meteorological extremes in the recent special issue of *Marxism Today* on 'The Blair project'. Here Blair's image of the citizen is interpreted by Stuart Hall as 'the lonely individual, "set free" of the state to face the hazards of the global weather alone, armed against incalculable risk, privately insured up to the hilt against every eventuality.... man as "poor, bare, fork'd animal", isolated and at bay before the elements' (Hall 1998: 12).

These are descriptions and explanations by sociologists of what is happening. My question is, though, how such explanations relate to social policy. The notion of the rational individual needing to take responsibility is an output of sociological analysis, but it is presented as an input by the lifelong learning policy makers; the theorists interpret it as an equivocal characteristic of post- or late modernity, while the government treats it as an engine of success. In earlier work, Giddens proposed the notion of 'duality of structure' to describe 'the essential recursiveness of life' (Giddens 1979: 5), whereby human agency and social structure are logically implicated in each other. Routine social behaviour reproduces

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social institutions, which in turn are in various ways 'reconstituted in day-to-day social activity' (see Stubbs 1996: 59). Reflexivity is also reproductive, so that 'the reflexive monitoring of action both draws upon and reconstitutes the institutional organisation of a society' (Giddens 1979: 255). Thus the notion of medium and outcome as one and the same is not strange to sociologists, but it is where the pain comes in periods of change. And while the taking of responsibility may be presented to the public as the sine qua non of a learning society, as Walter Mosley's hero Easy Rawlins says, 'you couldn't hold me responsible for anything because I didn't have anything' (Mosley 1997: 148).

Data and method of the study

The purpose of adopting a corpus-based approach to the study of a discourse is to enable the analysis to reach beyond an intuitive interpretation based on one human brain's reading of sampled texts to the discovery of significant collocational patterns retrieved and presented from a much wider range of texts. To this end, I created for my earlier study a corpus of 900,000 words of recent British and EU literature on the subject of the future of education in general and lifelong learning in particular, henceforward referred to as the LL corpus. This consisted largely of official or semi-official publications plus some rather more reflective and critical texts. All of these items except one was downloaded via the Internet in mid 1998 (see Appendix), and many of the sites used have continued to add considerable amounts of material. While I was aware at the time I created the corpus that there was also a sizeable international print literature, to which I referred, I have since realised that this is far larger than I had imagined, covering adult education and notions of a learning society as well as lifelong learning, and ranging from the locally descriptive to the abstractly theoretical (see, for example, the bibliographies in Economic and Social Research Council 1999 and Dohmen 1996). This analytical and descriptive work is thus not represented in my corpus, which is essentially the on-line public and political face of lifelong learning plus a small sub-corpus of critique directed at it. As a reference corpus against which to compare the use of *individuals* and *people* in the LL corpus, I used the 100 million word British National Corpus to examine their occurrence in the broader context of daily use.

The study of the characteristic collocations of words makes it possible to show their associations and connotations, and thus the assumptions which they embody (Stubbs 1996: 172). Part of my analysis of *individuals* and *people* therefore deals with their collocations. However, as Stubbs points out, in general usage different forms of a lemma have different collocations and occur with different frequencies, and individual forms are not distributed evenly across different grammatical positions in the clause. I therefore also examine how the meanings and ideological implications of *individuals* and *people* are constructed by their disposition in the structure of the language.

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Participants in lifelong learning

There are three primary participants in learning in the LL corpus—*learners* (500 occurrences), *individuals* (705) and *people* (1450). In the case of *individuals*, I am focusing my analysis mainly on the plural form since the literature itself represents the participants in the learning society primarily in the plural. However, as Table 2 shows later, *individual* as a singular noun occurs 180 times and as an adjective a further 706 times, a sufficient frequency to require some comment later in the analysis.

Individuals and collectivities

The collocations of *learners*, which invariably occurs in the plural, associate them with a somewhat passive and unfulfilled role and with vocational activity, whereas *individuals* and *people* are more upmarket (see Piper in press, where *learners* are discussed in detail). *Individuals* and *people*, however, demonstrate different collocational behaviour, as we can see from Table 1.

Table 1
Top 10 lexical collocates of *individuals* and *people*

Individuals	*People*
employers	young
learning	education
education	learning
higher*	higher*
needs	training
groups	skills
families	investors*
organisations	qualifications
society	opportunities
lifelong	number

**These words are particularly salient because of either particular formalised activities within one corpus document, such as Investors in People, or because the list was skewed somewhat by the relative size within the corpus of the Dearing Report on higher education.*

The most immediately striking collocational characteristic of *individuals* in the corpus is that nearly one in three occurrences (213 altogether) is in a cluster with, and thus in contrast to, social collectivities of some kind. These clusters have their own semantic and formal patterns. *Individuals* are linked with a wide range of social groups and institutions, about half of which, as their top lexical collocate in Table 1 suggests, are related to employment. About three quarters of these collectivity structures are binary pairs linked by *and*, so that we have *'something' and individuals* or *individuals and...*

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businesses, companies, employers, groups, organisations, society, institutions, communities, the labour market, the nation, their families, their employers,

while the other quarter mostly go in threes, such as

individuals, companies and sponsors; public authorities, voluntary groups and individuals; employers, individuals and the public purse; individuals, the nation and the future; the state, individuals and their families.

The prevalence of these patterns suggests at least two characteristics of individualisation which we discussed earlier. One is Giddens's proposition that individuals have to create their own 'commitments and networks... under the overall conditions and models of the welfare state'. These corpus collectivities not only imply such commitments and networks but also appear to offer *individuals* a central position within them. By far the most favoured combination in both binary and triadic structures is for *individuals* to occur in first position, e.g. *individuals, enterprises and government*; *individuals and employers*. This pattern accounts for nearly three-quarters of all combinations and suggests that in the LL corpus *individuals* tend to be 'thematised' within such nominal groups. If we look at what theme signifies in linguistic terms, Halliday describes it as 'the ground from which the clause is taking off' (Halliday 1994: 38). This definition brings to mind Coffield's protesting judgment that 'the main thrust of policy in both the UK and in the EC is to give the pivotal role in constructing the Learning Society to the individual' (Coffield 1996c: 81).

The collectivities associated with *individuals* appear to vary between the different sub-corpora of the LL corpus, although the small numbers of occurrences in each one provide only rough and ready evidence. The 109 binary *individuals and* combinations, about half of all the different combinatory clusters, come entirely from the UK literature except for two occurrences in EC documents, perhaps suggesting a particular UK emphasis on the core, or thematised, role of the individual. The most frequent collocating groups in this literature are those relating to business and employment—*businesses, companies, firms, employers*—who account for around 50 of the 700 odd occurrences of *individuals*. *The Learning Age*, the policy statement from the DfEE (1998), concerns itself primarily with *individuals and employers*, *businesses* and *companies*, presumably representing the government's espousal of the human capital model of lifelong learning. The Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997), with its educational intent, offers a slightly wider social range, including *employers* but with a lot of *individuals and their families* and *individuals and society*. The Fryer Report (Fryer 1997) is altogether more communally minded, including *employers* but also a lot of *individuals and families*, *representatives*, *groups*, *institutions*, *organisations* and *communities*. The Newcastle ESRC report (Coffield 1996a) has few occurrences, suggesting that the critical literature avoids the institutionalised networking model of *individuals*. Fryer favours long collectivities of three or more, whereas these are more or less absent from the DfEE and EU documents. This is an impressionistic set of evidence, but it does warn us of the potential inaccuracies of espousing an undigested holistic interpretation of corpus data.

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Individuals as agents

The second relevant characteristic of individualisation is Beck's notion of institutionalised individualism, whereby the welfare state imposes expectations and bestows rights on individuals on the basis of their presupposed participation in two other institutionalised processes, employment and education. The LL corpus clusters suggest an even greater range and interpenetration of institutions with the lives of *individuals*. However, the evidence of the clusters alone is not sufficient to support this claim, so I turn next to a comparative analysis of *individuals* both in isolation and in collectivities. Initially I will examine the sentence structures in which they occur in terms of theme and subject, and secondly the processes and participants with which they are associated.

First a note on terminology. This kind of analysis focuses on the individual as an agent in the processes of the learning society, whereas another formulation is of the individual as a social actor. Agency, however, is constructed differently in social and linguistic theory. 'Sociological agency,' says van Leeuwen, 'is not always realised by linguistic agency, by the grammatical role of "Agent"; it can also be realised in many other ways, for instance by possessive pronouns... or by a prepositional phrase with "from"' (van Leeuwen 1996: 32). Halliday characterises a grammatical Agent as a 'participant functioning as an external cause' (Halliday 1994: 164), an example being *Mary sailed the boat*. Agent, in systemic linguistic terms, is thus in contrast to other participants in the clause such as Behaver, Senser and Sayer, all deriving their functional label from the nature of the process which they govern. For my purposes, however, I use the word agent in van Leeuwen's sociological sense, and thus in lower case, to describe the controller of or responsibility taker for any process of whatever kind. This use is rather akin to Halliday's proposed catch-all 'function of INITIATOR', which takes 'account of the executive role' (*ibid*: 171).

The fact that *individuals* are mostly, as it were, in theme position within collections of other social groupings, i.e. within the nominal group, is not reflected by either their thematisation or subject status at sentence level. Of the 705 occurrences in the corpus, only 59, including 5 combinations of *individuals* and other groups, act as subject of a sentence (8 per cent of the total), of which 34 are theme (5 per cent); *individuals* act as clause subject more often (142 occurrences). While the total number of *individuals* as subjects or themes of sentences and clauses (201) accounts for more than a quarter of all their occurrences in the data, this pattern is much less frequent than *individuals* in parallel "thematised" roles in nominal constructions. In groups like *individuals, companies and sponsors* they take first position in more than 70 per cent of cases. This suggests that *individuals*' participation in social institutions and networks is more central than their role as agents, and that while they are indeed social actors, they are acted upon more often than acting.

Where *individuals* are actors, they are presented as rational citizens committed to the lifelong learning vision and, in systemic-functional terms, as Sensers and Agents. Thus, to quote just a few examples, *individuals* have abilities and responsibilities so that they *can*

> *accumulate funds (in an individual learning account), turn (to learning opportunities), obtain qualifications, pay their contribution,*

they *must*

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take responsibility for learning,

they *need*

to be aware of their own competencies, manage their own careers, keep their fingers on the pulse of change,

they should

accept more control over the development of their own learning

and they *will*

have to change radically, need to take a greater share.

Such modal constructions account for more than a third of *individuals* where they are the subject of a finite verb. Nearly another third finds *individuals* carrying out successful rational mental processes or material actions of the same kind: *achieve, acquire, contribute, repay, enhance, take responsibility, succeed* and so on. In the corpus, therefore, two thirds of the occurrences of *individuals* represent Giddens's Third Way of 'no rights without responsibilities', playing their part in underpinning the UK government's principles for maintaining competitiveness. It is all extremely positive and straightforward, so that the notion of failure on the part of *individuals* is denied through the simple rhetorical device of such failure not being mentioned. The two exceptions in the sub corpora are some of the European Community literature and the academic critiques. Only here do we find echoes of Beck's warning that failure 'to plan, understand, design, or act' (Beck 1994: 16) will lead to *individuals* suffering self-inflicted consequences, a failure likely to involve poverty.

However the corpus reveals evidence that we need not concern ourselves over much about the threat of failure since the discourse is full of assumptions about how *individuals* can be supported in their striving for rational citizenship. *Individuals* are followed nearly 70 times by *to*-infinitives, mostly projected by an earlier occurrence of a finite verb like *enable* or *encourage* governed by an institutional subject of varying vagueness. The kind of thing they should be enabled to do is to

assemble their qualifications, choose their method of learning, invest more in their human capital, raise their sights, save and borrow for investment in their own learning, sustain the learning habit.

In systemic grammar terms, *individuals* are thus Beneficiaries or Receivers. Methodologically speaking, however, such participant roles are all too easy to read off the concordance by a rightward sort, and if such a claim is to be substantiated, more than 700 corpus examples of *individuals* require a more detailed examination of processes and participants. That *individuals* really are Beneficiaries and Receivers, however, is indeed borne out by a detailed analysis of the whole sentences around each non-subject occurrence of *individuals*. This reveals consistently similar patterns of process and participation all across the corpus. A typical example, and there are hundreds among the 700-odd occurrences of *individuals*, is this one from *The Learning Age* (Department for Education and Employment 1998):

> *(Learning Accounts) might increase both choice for individuals and total funding by providing a greater incentive to individuals and businesses to match the Government's investment* (para.2.16).

Here an institution (Learning Accounts) performs two enabling processes (increasing choice, providing an incentive) of which individuals and businesses are the Beneficiaries, making it possible for them to participate in the government's lifelong learning agenda. In this process individuals are implied actors, but they are not grammatical actors since they are not the subject of the finite verb.

It is a widespread phenomenon of the corpus that finite verbs of action are governed by institutions or by their products (e.g. policies, plans), which function to enable *individuals* to carry out the desired action as Beneficiaries and secondary actors. So while *individuals* are expected to take rational decisions, be responsible citizens and to stage their own lives, they have to do what they are enabled to do by someone else. This is further evidence of the institutionalisation of *individuals*: they spend their time in the corpus responding to institutional agendas. Far from the self-seeking individual of neo-liberal economic theory and the individualism of the me-generation, this reiteration of *individuals* as secondary but not controlling social actors represents the tensions between the conflicting ideologies of the individual which run through the late modern world.

It is not just *individuals* who are subject to the agency of institutions in this way. As in the example above, the sentence pattern of an enabling institution acting as the agent in creating participation is paralleled by the frequent occurrence of *employers*, *businesses*, and so on acting with *individuals* as joint secondary agents. As regards the rights and responsibilities associated with training and learning, *employers* are also the objects of this implicitly dirigiste discourse.

The rational citizen

The common collocations of *individuals* produce a highly positive semantic prosody of the rational, socialised and self-improving member of society. Their attributes can be inferred from the twenty to thirty occurrences of *individuals are*

> *more highly educated, the key to the UK's competitiveness, able to exercise responsibility,*

individuals who

> *can afford to pay a higher proportion, possess advanced skills, succeed in opening up opportunities, thrive on learning, have particular links with, or positions in, the community,*

individuals'

> *decision-making, general level of knowledge, independence,*

and individuals with

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credit cards, greater independence, real discretion over resources.

These are only a few of many more examples, of which only an almost invisible handful are negative, such as *individuals with a bad debt record* or *who have been discouraged from learning.*

The fact that Beck's self-constituting citizens have much to do as they 'plan, understand, design themselves as individuals' is seen particularly in collocations with *their own.* This expression occurs nearly 400 times in the LL corpus, about a third of the these being within the predicate of *individuals, people, students, learners, employees* and other consumers of learning. These *can, should, will,* or are otherwise implicitly supposed to or enabled to

> *look single-mindedly after their own 'portfolio' careers, assess their own progress, create their own job, determine their own futures, share financial responsibility for their own learning, identify their own development needs, improve their own lives, gain confidence in their own learning abilities, have a financial stake in their own learning, make their own decisions, meet their own costs, modify their own educational process, take charge of their own lives, plan the development of their own learning, own their own destiny, start their own businesses, own their own personal computer, understand their own learning styles, upgrade their own learning technology skills, use their own time.*

Again these are a selection of the multiple instances which demonstrate both how pervasive the roles and responsibilities of *individuals* are in the discourse of lifelong learning and how far metaphorical constructions of rational behaviour suffuse their collocation patterns. Interpreted against broader social theories of individualisation, the relentless socio-economic demands in the linguistic environment of *their own* accumulate evidence for the compulsive nature of the 'project of the self', or at least the project of the rational economic self, and the demand for the making of the individual by the individual.

The official UK policy-making discourse of lifelong learning largely occludes the issue of what happens if sub-agents like *individuals* and *employers* reject the exhortations directed at them. And on the other side of the coin as well, it says equally little about what the exact outcomes will be if they wholeheartedly do buy into the implied agenda. Neither threats nor promises are made beyond vague economic generalisations. The lack of any specificity as to outcomes in conjunction with underspecified institutional actors and the persistent use of obligation verbs and implied exhortations directed at *individuals* creates an unsettling vacuum. In this way the roles constructed for *individuals* reveal Beck's 'expansion and heightening of the intention of control', an 'intention' rather than a fact, as though something vaguely threatening, but we don't quite know what, will happen if these compulsions are not accomplished. Moreover the extensive regularity of the patterning of *their own* adds an impressive testimony to the notion of reflexivity on the part of *individuals* and other learning consumers. This is a discourse which both hides and implies the 'dominant avoidance imperatives' of Beck's risk society.

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Learners as consumers

The part to be played by *individuals* in lifelong learning is an internally contradictory one, although this conflict is represented only covertly within the discourse. One of its forms emerges in the requirements of *individuals* to engage both in the exercise of responsibility and in the practice of consumption. Learning is at once an obligation and a cultural product, and the linguistic behaviour of *their own* is a particularly salient example. The expression *their own* implies possession or acquisition, and the verbs which govern it—*accept*, *look after*, *create*, *finance*, *pay for*, *improve*, *gain*, *invest in*, *modify*, *own*—and the entities thus possessed, acted upon and acquired—*responsibilities*, *careers*, *jobs*, *learning*, *training* and so on—script learning within a cycle of producing and consuming where its various participants— *individuals*, *people*, *students*, *learners*, *employees*—play out both roles.

In their account of *The Story of the Sony Walkman*, the cultural theorists du Gay *et al.* discuss three models of consumption theory [du Gay *et al.* 1997 #199: 83-109), all of which are relevant to our discussion. The 'production of consumption' argument represents the desire to consume goods and services as created by their producers, a process clearly seen in the exhortatory rhetoric of the LL corpus, where learning is presented as something which *individuals* and their associated collectivities need. However, while this analysis draws on the Frankfurt School's pessimistic assessment of a debased and manipulative material culture, learning in fact does not seem to be something which the consumers, or beneficiaries, of learning actually want. Perhaps this is because, as Baudrillard has suggested, people experience need less as desiring an object than as desiring social meaning (Baudrillard 1998: 45). And when we are faced with the fact that, as the European Commission warns, 'ever-smaller numbers of pupils (will be) required by the labour market' (European Commission 1996: para.170), it is not at all transparent for either providers, employers or learners what the social meaning of lifelong learning might be.

This second argument, 'consumption as socio-cultural differentiation', extends the notion of need into a cultural process, whereby material culture has 'identity' value through which consumers seek to communicate markers of social and cultural difference (du Gay *et al*: 96). Thus consumption, in Bourdieu's view, is simultaneously a material and a symbolic activity (Bourdieu 1984). In western societies the tradition of learning, at least as a process of cultural consumption which extends well into young adult life, has indeed been a marker of actual and symbolic differentiation, but one exercised by powerful and excluding social groups who have mostly taken pains to abstract high status learning activity from direct engagement with economic processes. Similarly for younger learners school is 'the chief carrier of undiluted meritocratic values of work, discipline and reward, whilst the wider commercial culture is ... a celebration of luck, hedonism, leisure, fun and good fortune', so that identification with the one perfectly likely to preclude identification with the other (Young 1999: 85). This is a problem for the proponents of 'the Learning Society', since lifelong learning, says Coffield, has regrettably inherited the worthy 'beatitudes' of middle-class educational experience (Coffield 1996b: 3). So in the late twentieth century governmental and quasi-governmental institutions are enthusiastically reinterpreting such social meanings of learning with a view to widening and instrumentalising educational participation, presumably in the hope that the previously excluded and alienated can be regulated to re-identify themselves. The problem is that the causal links between the two

processes of government regulation and individual reidentification are difficult to manage and highly unpredictable, as we saw earlier with regard to the young consumers of the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme.

The third model examined by du Gay *et al* is one where consumption is itself production. In this explanation consumption and production reconstitute each other in a cycle of commodification and appropriation, where products are changed in response to consumers' activities and where consumers make their own meanings out of what is produced. Du Gay *et al* critique one particular Walkman study based on this model in a way which is distinctly reminiscent of my interpretation of *individuals* and lifelong learning. According to them, the study 'seems to view the Walkman as an inherently good thing', believing it 'to be empowering and liberating for individuals, providing them with a cultural tool for taking charge of their own lives' (*ibid*: 108). They characterise the research as 'voluntarist' because it takes no account of how the commodity has been produced over its lifetime and 'populist' because it assumes 'that the Walkman has uniformly positive effects' (*ibid*: 108). In the same way, learning is presented in the LL corpus as a desirable commodity undifferentiated from its social, economic and cultural meanings and produced, or enabled, by frequently under- or un-specified institutional agents. Similarly with the 'learning is fun' school, who ignore the inconvenient fact that learning may also be difficult and disturbing (Coffield 1996b: 7). Moreover its consumers are constructed as collectivities which are highly differentiated in terms of power relations and motives (*individuals*, *employers*, *organisations*), and these people are then supposed jointly to produce the learning society. Seen in terms of commodification and appropriation, the processes by which lifelong learning is consumed and produced are either oversimplified or merely unaddressed. In terms of consumption theories in general, the implied message for the advocates of lifelong learning is that success depends on its consumers, *individuals* or whoever, being able to produce their own coherent and motivating meanings for learning and to find sufficient common purposes on which to construct the learning society.

Other grammatical forms of 'individual'

Individual as an adjective occurs 706 times, *individual* as a singular noun 180 times (see Table 2 below). The adjective mainly premodifies nouns which we have already identified as central to the topic of the discourse. *Individual* is used with institutions, groups and activities associated with learning, so that about a quarter of occurrences collocate with *institutions*, *schools*, *students*, *learners*, etc. although with a few mentions of *firms* and *workers*. A further quarter represent collocations concerned with the rational exercise of citizenship, so that we have, for example, *individual*

> *achievements*, *behavioural skills*, *choices*, *competence*, *contributions*, *employability*, *investment*, *learning*, *performance*, *responsibility*, *savings*, *skills*, *work*

and the remaining occurrences reveal no particular patterns.

As a singular noun *individual* is present roughly a quarter of the time of its plural form, the exception being the European documentation where *individual* occurs relatively much more often. Syntactically, *the/an individual* is similarly and frequently a sub-actor enabled to participate in the learning process by institutional agents, although unlike *individuals*, the

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singular version rarely associates with other social groupings and thus participates alone. *Individual* is almost entirely preceded by the unmodified determiners *an* (31), *the* (122) or *each/every* (24). Attributes are assigned by implication through the use of structures like *of the individual, every individual with, the individual who*, just as with *individuals* in the plural. However, while these attributes are similarly positive, they add much more of a cultural, cognitive and affective dimension to the socio-economic rationality which dominates the attributional construction of pluralised *individuals*. The representative selection of these attributes below shows how the balance is different:

> *allow the individual to control the time and pace of their learning, geographical mobility broadens the individual's horizon, each individual needs an employability strategy, giving every individual the opportunity to integrate into society, the individual invests energy and creativity, the individual would enter into a loan agreement, the individual's expectation and experience of higher education, the individual will be called upon to understand complex situations, barriers which affect an individual's decision to take up education.*

While the singular *individual* is not a free agent and experiences the same pressures and uncertainties claimed by social theorists, he or she appears nevertheless to be more than the mere socio-economic sub-actor of the plural form. This contrast within the lifelong learning discourse, even though formed as an impression only on the basis of a 180-line concordance, may be a significant one. In the LL corpus the aggregation of singular individuals into a generic pluralised *individuals*, which is then further aggregated into a coordinated nominalisation with one or more collective social groups, suggests that in making policy for lifelong learning, the government is wittingly or unwittingly contributing to the institutionalisation of the individual. The linguistic process represents, and indeed helps to construct, a socio-economic process.

People in the discourse of lifelong learning

For all the significance I have attached to *individuals*, *people* occur more than twice as often in the LL corpus (see Table 2). However, they are different from *individuals*, more indirectly concerned with learning and altogether less socio-economically virtuous and self-constructing.

Like *individuals*, *people* are sub-actors in processes enabled by institutional agents of some kind. However, where with *individuals* the enabling is often implicit, as in the example earlier of *increasing choice, providing an incentive*, etc., with *people* it is more specifically expressed through the suggestion that they should be *helped* (32 occurrences), given encouragement, opportunity and so on. This support is directed at a wider range of more general processes than is the case for *individuals*, so that, to quote a few examples, *people* are able to

> *develop awareness of themselves, learn at home, recognise and tackle inequalities, play a full part in their community, invest in their own training, engage in ... creative and leisure activity, undertake employment, make use of the new technologies.*

While *people* thus share the positive rational attributes of *individuals* and have responsibilities to exercise, they also have rights, they fulfil broad social and cultural roles, and they embody both positive and negative features of the human condition. Some instances are *people's*

> *aspirations and very identities, chances to shape and manage their lives, confidence in themselves, creativity, critical faculties, cultural horizon, fears, Giro cheques, health, homes, motivation, perception of where they 'fit.*

In the case of *individuals* their ubiquitous collocation with socio-economic institutions constructs them into being institutionalised themselves. *People*, on the other hand, seem curiously much more like 'real' individuals in the sense of being free agents, standing alone and collocationally untrammelled by omnipresent networks and joint agendas. Since *people*'s abilities and responsibilities are much less emphasised, with relatively little about what they *can* do and hardly anything about what they *must*, *need* or *should* do, they are not subject to the relentless compulsion of *individuals*. *Individuals* are the archetypal actors of the risk society, busily securing themselves against change and ensuring their survival by the comprehensive exercise of socio-economic control. It is they, as we saw above, who possess *credit cards*, those key symbols of the consuming society; it is only *people* who have *Giro cheques*.

People in the LL corpus have neither a positive nor negative semantic prosody, and while they enter into many of the same positive collocations as *individuals*, they are also collocated with negative concepts. They are

> *less capable, already in ghettos, especially vulnerable, regularly deterred, paid one-third of the minimum wage,*

there are *people with*

> *difficulties, disabilities, little previous achievement, literacy problems, low skills, special needs,*

and people who

> *feel that learning is not for them, have failed, have foundered in the school system, need help with basic skills, suffer mid-career blues.*

While *individuals* are associated with collectivities, *people* are classified. These classifications may be designated within their predicate or by a pre-modifying adjective, and they place *people* in a social or geographic location which may be positive, negative or neutral. To quote a few instances, they come *from* somewhere—*Black and Asian communities, lower-income families, the Province*—they are *in* somewhere—*an advanced society, initial training, positions of influence, Scotland, wheelchairs*—and they are *of all ages, of the North, of the European Union*. *People* come in types, primarily *young* in this corpus since *young* premodifies around every fourth occurrence, but they are also *older, disabled, educated, employed, qualified, skilled, disadvantaged, unemployed*. Additionally, and very obviously, they are quantifiable, so that 100 concordance lines are taken up with *many*, *most* and numbers in *million*, and these expressions project all kinds of

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social observations about *people*. These comments are both positive and negative and are of a range and vagueness unlike the narrower socio-economic frame of action attributed to *individuals*. *Individuals* are thus distinguished from *people* in being very underdetermined in terms of their quantities and qualities, but highly determined in their identity as socio-economic actors.

Individuals and people in the language as a whole

People and *individuals* in the British National Corpus show both differences and similarities with the LL corpus. Table 2 presents numerical differences, including the various grammatical forms of *individual*, showing that while *people* occurs at a rather similar frequency per thousand words in both corpora, the relative difference between the occurrence of *people* (123,427 occurrences in 100 million words) and *individuals* (7966) in the BNC is very much larger, a ratio of more than fifteen to one. In the LL corpus *people* and *individuals* occur in a ratio of two to one, a clear demonstration of the significance of *individuals* as generic participants in this discourse.

In order to examine the collocational behaviour of all the BNC variants in the Table, I ran a randomised concordance of 1000 instances of each, and these provide the data for the discussion below.

Table 2
Occurrences of *individuals* and *people* in the Lifelong Learning Corpus and the British National Corpus

	Lifelong learning corpus (900,00 words)		British National Corpus (100 million words)	
	Occurrences	Ratio to every 1000 words	Occurrences	Ratio to every 1000 words
individuals	705	0.78	7966	0.08
individual (Adj)	706	0.78	9671	0.10
individual (N)	180	0.20	3570	0.03
individuals and/ and individuals	184	0.20	1057	0.01
people	1450	1.61	123427	1.23

In the BNC *individuals* occur much less often in collectivities with *and*, in one in ten concordance lines rather than one in three as in the LL corpus. Where it occurs, however,

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the pattern is syntactically similar in that most cases occur in the form *individuals and*, so that *individuals* are again 'thematised' within the nominal group. Perhaps this suggests a general rule in English, whereby *individuals* in combination with other groups tends to come first. 67 of the 1000 instances of *individuals* are followed by *in*, referring to states (*in everyday situations*), roles (*in high places*) and groups (*in the placebo group*), an uncommon usage in the LL corpus. 5 per cent of instances show *individuals*, although still generic, marked for identity *as individuals*, mostly with reference to their rights, values and treatment. This is also an unusual collocation in the LL corpus, as are, predictably, the 23 occurrences of *between individuals—communication, conflict, friendship*. This suggests that in general usage, even when they are in some kind of grouping, *individuals* are varied and identifiable as separate human beings and, while they are often the rational socio-economic actors of the lifelong learning discourse, they also partake in a richer range of human activity.

The occurrences of *individual* as an adjective reveal no particular pattern, but there are some significant differences between the singular and plural forms of the noun. In the BNC *individual* as a singular noun occurs nearly twice as often relative to the plural form as it does in the LL corpus. Similarly, though, nearly every other occurrence is preceded by the unmodified definite or indefinite article or by other determiners like *another, any, every, each*, suggesting that in general usage as well as in the LL corpus, the singular *individual* is a lone or separate social actor rather than part of a set of collectivities. Its two most frequent collocation clusters are *of the individual* and *the individual is*. In the first case, what are imputed to the *individual* are civic rights and value-laden attributes such as *freedom, power, autonomy, self-awareness, fitness, history, liberty, philosophy*. In contrast, many of the instances of *the individual is* are passive constructions, where *the individual is adjudged, caught up, charged, forced, observed, protected, socialised, told*. This produces a similar two-sided representation to the LL corpus *individuals*, who are both rational-thinking rights-holding citizens and subjects of institutional compulsion, or, in Beck's terms, the subject of entitlements but also of increasing obligations. Similarly when the singular *individual* is followed by a modal verb, the obligation or restraint tends to govern civic or economic activity—*an individual can sue for libel, can borrow money, must respond appropriately, should consider making contributions*—while his or her attributes are overall more personal and emotional than in the LL corpus—*beliefs, feelings, personality, responsibility, self-fulfilment, subconscious, suffering*. An *individual* is also occasionally allowed to be abnormal—*a complex, highly secretive individual, an inadequate individual, an alarmingly tall and thin individual.*

People and *individuals* take on similar structural roles in sentences and clauses in both the BNC and the LL corpus. People and the singular form of *individual* are rarely grammatical subjects in either, whereas plural *individuals* occur as sentence or clause subject in around one in four instances in both. This suggests that in general usage too *individuals* are regularly subjected to someone else's agency, of which there is further evidence in 20 passive structures in the concordance, where they tend to be *coerced, encouraged, prosecuted, treated* just as in their singular form. As sentence or clause subjects and as social actors *individuals* engage primarily in mental processes such as *contemplate, exercise discretion, invest, make decisions* and *share our concerns*, and they possess or exercise *commitments, critical thinking, perception, savings*. However this rational cognitive

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activity is less single-mindedly oriented towards economic survival and consumption than in LL and often sounds just as much like the things that are done by *people*.

People in fact do similar things in both corpora. The BNC shows them to engage in routine daily activities like *bothering*, *helping*, *standing*, *travelling* and to exhibit a range of human strengths and weaknesses like being *better*, *indiscreet*, *normal*, *possessive*. As in the LL corpus they stand for a generic concept in their own right and are not collectivised with other groups, and they are heavily quantified. *Many*, *most*, *more* and *a lot of* are found in more than 100 of the random 1000 concordance lines, and nearly 50 lines give numbers of *people*, varying from huge to small. *People* are classified in both corpora, particularly by age group—*older*, *young*, *elderly*—but in the BNC, whether by chance or not, they are also portrayed more negatively—*cruel*, *disabled*, *guilty*. This adds further evidence to suggest that the difference between *people* and *individuals* in terms of their attributes and activities is less marked in general usage than in the lifelong learning discourse.

Conclusions

> 'Modern social life impoverishes individual action, yet furthers the appropriation of new possibilities; it is alienating, yet at the same time, characteristically, human beings react against social circumstances which they find oppressive. Late modern institutions create a world of mixed opportunity and high-consequence risk'. (Giddens 1991: 175).

This is a quotation from the man who is allegedly Tony Blair's favourite sociologist (Walker 1999) and therefore by implication a key theorist of New Labour. And his message of 'mixed opportunity and high consequence risk' is the same representation of conflict and ambiguity which is linguistically encoded in the discourse of lifelong learning. Similarly this little text also replicates in its semantico-grammatical structure what has emerged from the study of the LL corpus. *Individuals* are, by implication, subjected negatively to the agency of institutional forces while human actors do not move into subject position in the sentence until they are characterised as *human beings* (*people*?); these human beings then act as Sensers of mental processes.

This tiny example, set against the broader outcomes of the study, shows in microcosm how *individuals* and *people* are different. While their referents in the real world may be the same, a computer-assisted examination of their syntactic and collocational behaviour shows that their sense as ideological markers is not. In this way linguistic analysis articulates with social analysis, providing evidence for the constituent potential of language in theories of society and culture.

In the language as a whole *individuals* correlate much less closely with their representations in these socio-cultural theories, participating as actors in a wide range of socio-cultural, cognitive and affective processes. This difference is hardly surprising, in that one feature of theoretical argument is formal and densely-structured language, which is likely to be shared with official policy documents but which is dissipated in general usage. However reasons of style do not account for the way in which the semantico-grammatical and collocational behaviour of *individuals* relate the lifelong learning discourse to analyses of late modernity.

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Individuals in this discourse are constituted as both restrained and liberated. They are institutionalised collectivities, rational citizens, beneficiaries of opportunity, consumers and producers. They are secondary agents subject to external social, economic and cultural forces, and social actors responsible for writing their own lives.

Many questions remain, for social and cultural theorists, for politicians, and for linguists. A central concern for social theory has always been the role of the individual in the relationship of human agency with social structure. Giddens, as we have seen, presents a model of what he calls duality of structure, "the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices" (1979: 5). This notion of the reproduction of human institutions through routine social activity is is one which he extends to language, so that "when I utter a grammatical English sentence in a casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the language as a whole' (*ibid*: 77). This emphasis parallels the assumption I have made in this paper that the repetition of linguistic patterns associated with *individuals* helps to produce and is in turn produced by patterns of social and cultural life. It means also that Giddens takes a robust line with regard to thinkers who treat social actors as 'cultural dopes' who are 'mere bearers of a mode of production' with 'no worthwhile understanding of their surroundings or the circumstances of their action' (*ibid*:72). Institutions, he says, 'do not just work "behind the backs" of the social actors who produce and reproduce them' (71)

In a response to Giddens, Lash criticises his analysis for taking a cognitive rather than a cultural view of reflexive modernity. He claims that 'structural change forces agency to be free from structure, forces individuals to free themselves from the normative expectations of the institutions of simple modernity and to engage in the construction of their own identities' (Lash 1994: 200). However, both the Giddens and the Lash position raise a basic implementational question for 'learning age' politicians. If people are at one and the same time consumers and producers of learning, if learning is both a medium and an outcome of socio-economic purposes, and if *people* with *giro cheques* are supposed to be transforming themselves into *individuals* with *credit cards*, how is this transformation to be managed? And note that this question immediately falls into the lexico-grammatical pattern of free individuals being institutionally controlled into a role of socio-economic responsibility.

A further issue for some social theorists is that in spite of the widespread emphasis on individual responsibility, the learning society as it emerges in my corpus may not be a moral society. In a wide ranging discussion of 'the responsible subject', Smart reflects on the claim that post-modern ethics has become a matter of accounts and calculation (Baumann 1993) and the enhancement of self interest, a prime representation of which is the consuming 'enterprise self' (Douglas 1994). Thus 'as an intrinsic concern for others has become more marginal, so the expectation of assuming or exercising *moral* responsibility has diminished' (Smart 1999:89, my italics). Similarly Lyotard, talking of higher education, sees learning as something which may 'circulate along the same lines as money, instead of for its "educational" value or political (administrative, diplomatic, military) importance (Lyotard 1984:6)', and knowledge as no longer motivated by the search for truth but aiming to improve 'the system's performance' (*ibid*:49). In the lifelong learning discourse responsibility and, by extension, values, do not include the

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prime moral principle of 'being for others' but are instead constructed as a means to ensure that individuals stage their own stand-alone biography and maintain the economy.

For the linguist there are methodological questions. Initially we might want to ask how far the social and cultural theorists are justified in their interpretation of individualisation in late modernity. Or are they deliberating on their own commentaries as these emerge intertextually in the policy documents which they themselves have helped to inspire? This is where linguistic analysis presents itself as an indispensable tool for social inquiry, making it possible in the present study, for instance, to examine in detail a large sample of such documents against the evidence both of the social theory in question and the wider sweep of the language. The conclusions which emerge—for example that the lemma *individual* behaves differently in this discourse and in general usage, that *individuals* and *people* are different, and that *people* is a far more frequent word in the whole language than it is in policy-making—suggest that academics and policy makers, or at least policy writers, do appear to be engaged in the co-construction of late modern individualism, whereas the population at large is less single-mindedly engaged in this mission.

Giddens, Beck and others, however, draw on a much wider range of sources for their analyses than texts provided by officialdom, in other words by the material in my corpus. Moreover a corpus lends itself to being treated as a unified data set, which, while offering the advantage of identifying salient patterns, produces an inevitable averaging out effect which precludes a more subtle analysis of contesting emphases within the discourse. Given the difficulty, therefore, of establishing the nature and boundaries of the discourse of lifelong learning, caveats are due if it is to be used as a source of material on the basis of which to compare social theories. Moreover individualism, or the process of individualisation, is more than what can be interpreted from an examination merely of the various word forms of *individual*. As Fowler says of critical linguistics, 'significance (ideology) cannot simply be read off the linguistic forms that description has identified in the text' (Fowler 1996: 9), and it is all too easy to use concordances to 'read off' the meanings one is looking for. In terms of what the process means to the general population of *individuals*, and indeed what lifelong learning means to its target participants, attention also needs to be paid to the relation between texts and their audiences, particularly where, as in this case, these interpretative communities are diverse in their power relations to lifelong learning—*employers* and *providers* as well as *employees*, *individuals* and *people*, to say nothing of politicians and academics.

While on all these counts a concordance-based corpus study has its limitations, each of them suggests at the same time further lines of inquiry. And inquiry is necessary, given the divergent agendas, differential power relations and cultural confusions of the discourse of lifelong learning. Creating and being constructed by these ambiguities is a New Labour government which in its early formation made constant play of its appeal to and concern with 'the people' and yet which delineates its policies for 'the learning age' and 'the learning society' within the individualised compulsions of the risk society and the age of consumption. If these policies of late modernity are to mean anything, considerably more understanding will be needed to underpin their implementation.

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Note
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